

# Economy

“The economic outlook is still very uncertain. It depends on how long and how deep the recession will be. It also depends on what we do to upturn the downturn. The Labour Movement has set a very high, very challenging target. If the various tripartite partners are able to work together closely, we will be able to achieve the target. We should not be deterred by the difficulties in achieving it. We should strive to do our best and aim to achieve what we set out to do.”

Gan Kim Yong, Acting Minister for Manpower (left of picture, with SNEF President Stephen Lee)



Enhancing Its Image... With its core business forecasted to dip in 2009, Singapore Cruise Centre will send all its frontline staff to attend the Certified Service Professional programme and improve customers' service experience.

## Union Leaders Not Shut Out In Plant Shut Down

### Cookson Management And CIEU Leaders Learn Importance Of Trust And Open Communications



By Naseema Banu Maideen

The shop floors of Cookson Semiconductor Packaging Materials have been vacant longer than usual this festive season. Prior to the two days of gazetted holidays for the Lunar New Year, production workers and technicians were asked to take six days' annual leave – from 21 to 23 January and from 28 to 30 January. The pre-holidays leave affected the manufacturing plant, while the post-holidays leave involved the whole site. All employees will return to work on 2 February 2009.

What comforted the workers in the manufacturing plant, which produces epoxy molding compounds for use in integrated circuit, was that the Chemical Industries Employees' Union had succeeded in securing for them better terms for the shutdown. After many rounds of negotiations, the Cookson management agreed to abide by the Tripartite Guidelines on Managing Excess Manpower: Cookson paid 1.5 days' of salary, while workers were asked for their understanding and cooperation to clear 4.5 days of annual leave.

“Our relationship with the management was put to the test. It was only with good and open communications that we could work out this co-sharing plan with the bosses,” said Mr Mohamed Ismail



Bonds That Get Stronger... Mr Mohamed Ismail Meerasah (left) and Mr Effendy Mohd Shariff have worked hard at building good ties with the Cookson management, which has proved advantageous for workers in this downturn.

Meerasah, 45, a Senior Technician and Branch Chairman of Cookson Semiconductor Packaging Materials.

The Cookson management has also explored other cost-cutting measures in tandem with CIEU, said Mr Ismail.

“Workers in the manufacturing plant will go through the Skills Programme for Upgrading and Resilience (SPUR) over a 12-day training session. Most of our workers already have at least a National Institute of Technical Education Certificate in Mechatronics. Moving on, we will all attend courses in February and March to acquire new skills for better future employability.”

Workers in manufacturing industries have been the most vulnerable in the financial tsunami. The waves of this downturn had also threatened to wash off jobs in Cookson, with close to 80 per cent plunge in new orders. But CIEU's leaders have been fighting



hard to save as many jobs while they still can.

Said Mr Effendy Mohd Shariff, 42, a Senior Technician and Branch Secretary of the company: “There are days when we come in and just clean equipment. This is how bad the situation is. We are not completely against layoffs but we have to be convinced that our bosses go there only if that's the last and only road to take. By working closely with us, we are assured now that they are doing just that.”

These experiences shared by Mr Ismail and Mr Effendy were useful in reflecting the importance of maintaining good Labour-Management Relations through effective two-way communication at the second round of the “Upturn The Downturn Workshop”, organised by the Ong Teng Cheong Institute of Labour Studies on 20 January. The session, this time, was conducted for branch officials of CIEU.